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Lawmakers to Consider EMS Issues, Health-care Pricing

HELENA -- A legislative committee will take an in-depth look on Jan. 25 at how emergency medical services (EMS) are provided in Montana. It also will explore health-care pricing, as it continues work on two separate studies of health-care services.

The Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee also is expected to award a contract for a mental health study funded by the Legislature last year.

The discussion of EMS will include information compiled as part of an ongoing review by the Legislative Audit Division. Auditors have been looking at how many incidents state EMS providers respond to in a year, as well as how long it takes to respond, and how far away some Montanans might be from emergency medical help.

The committee also will hear from speakers who will discuss EMS reimbursement issues and how other states have addressed issues similar to those facing Montana's EMS providers.

The committee meeting will begin at 8 a.m. in Room 137 of the State Capitol.
The study of EMS issues was authorized by the 2007 Legislature in Senate Joint Resolution 5.

Also at the meeting, committee members will discuss proposals from consulting firms interested in conducting an inventory of mental health services in the state, identifying gaps in services, and recommending ways to fund additional services. The committee is expected to award a contract for the study. The
2007 Legislature appropriated $200,000 to pay for it.

The committee also will delve into health care pricing issues as part of its study of the health-care delivery system, authorized by SJR 15. Committee members want to explore ways to make it easier for consumers to have access to billing and pricing information for the medical services they receive. As part of that study, the committee will hear an update on a subcommittee's work on the issues of specialty hospitals and economic credentialing of physicians.

The subcommittee will meet Jan. 24 at 11 a.m. in Room 137 of the State Capitol.

Members of the SJR15 subcommittee are Sen. Dan Weinberg, D-Whitefish, and Rep. Ernie Dutton, R-Billings. They have invited a number of health-care providers to take part in a roundtable discussion on specialty hospitals, medical conflicts of interest, and economic credentialing.

Participants in the roundtable will include:

*   Paul Byorth, physician, Billings
*   Mike Driscoll, radiologist, Butte
*   Jim Elliott, Billings Physician Alliance, Billings
*   Jeff Fee, St. Patrick Hospital CEO, Missoula
*   Tamim Khaliqi, anesthesiologist, Great Falls Central Medical Surgery Center, Great Falls
*   James Kiser, St. James Hospital CEO, Butte
*   Patti Jo Lane, physical therapist, Great Falls Clinic, Great Falls
*   Audrey Mendenhall, co-owner of free-standing imaging centers in Butte and Helena
*   Jim Paquette, St. Vincent Healthcare CEO, Billings
*   Lorena Pettet, physical therapist, Manhattan
*   Keith Popovich, physician, Butte
*   Mark Rumans, Billings Clinic physician in chief, Billings
*   John Solheim, St. Peter's Hospital CEO, Helena
*   Velinda Stevens, HealthCenter Northwest & Kalispell Regional Medical Center CEO, Kalispell

In addition to Weinberg and Dutton, members of the Child, Family, Health and Human Services Interim Committee are Sens. Carol Juneau, D-Browning; Rick Laible, R-Darby; and Terry Murphy, R-Cardwell; and Reps. Edith Clark, R-Sweetgrass; and Teresa Henry and Diane Sands, both Missoula Democrats.